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RUCNFB/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 002175

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

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TAGS: IS KPAL LE PBTS PGOV SNAR SOCI SY

SUBJECT: MGLE01: ISF FACING INCREASING DRUG ENFORCEMENT
CHALLENGES SINCE SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Econoff attended a June 26 Internal Security Forces (ISF) briefing to the Mini-Dublin Group. Col. Kowalty Abdel Razzak, head of the ISF's 200-person drug enforcement unit, told the group that drug enforcement has become more difficult since the Syrian withdrawal. More farmers in the Biqa Valley are attempting to grow hashish and more drugs are coming into Lebanon across the porous border with Syria. Razzak identified the Syrian port of Latakia as the primary port for drugs arriving in Syria for transport into Lebanon. Lebanon remains primarily a transit country, but its own internal use has doubled in the last year. Razzak described his unit as lacking modern law enforcement technology and equipment. His officers are no longer permitted to use force in interrogations. Razzak identified other obstacles: the frequent turnover in his position on a nearly annual basis and ISF's inability to pursue suspects into the Palestinian refugee camps. Razzak provided drug enforcement statistics for 2004 and 2005. End summary.

LEBANON MORE TRANSIT
COUNTRY THAN EXPORTER

¶2. (C) On June 26, econoff attended a briefing by Col. Kowalty Abdel Razzak, head of drug enforcement in the Internal Security Forces (ISF), for diplomats from the Mini-Dublin Group held at the EU Mission in Beirut. Razzak reported that drug enforcement has become more difficult since Syria withdrew its troops in April 2005 (he euphemistically referred to it as "since the Hariri assassination.") Farmers in the Biqa Valley are once more attempting to grow hashish. To date, the ISF has been able to quickly destroy new hashish crops, but Razzak was concerned that his 200-person unit would not be able to handle a resumption of the widespread hashish cultivation last seen in the 1980s.

¶3. (C) Razzak said that Lebanon has not been a major exporter of hashish for years, despite the reputation of Lebanese hashish as the best in the Mediterranean. The real problem now is the flow of drugs of all kinds through the

Lebanese-Syrian border. Razzak admitted that the border with Syria is not controlled. There is a free flow of people, goods, and drugs through the border. Lebanon is a major transit country for drugs in the Mediterranean in part thanks to the porous border with Syria. Opium from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and ecstasy from the Netherlands arrives in the port of Latakia, Syria. Customs control in Latakia is not strict, according to Razzak, who would not expound on the reasons. Once the drugs are off-loaded in Latakia, they are transported via a short drive to Lebanon's northern border where they enter Lebanon unfettered. Razzak explained that it is cheaper to import opium from Afghanistan for USD 200 per kilo, than to grow it in Lebanon at a cost of USD 1,000 per kilo. Iranian heroin is smuggled overland through Iraq and Syria before being trucked across Lebanon's eastern border.

¶4. (C) Another major drug transit concern is air travel from South America. There is a large Lebanese community in South America, and some get involved in smuggling drugs into Lebanon via the airport. Razzak said that drugs have been discovered in the luggage and in the bodies of passengers arriving from Brazil, Venezuela, and Columbia. In addition, Turkey is major transit country for cocaine smuggled into Lebanon. The top destination countries for drugs transited through Lebanon are Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Jordan.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT FACING
MAJOR CHALLENGES

¶5. (C) Razzak told the Mini-Dublin diplomats that his

BEIRUT 00002175 002 OF 003

department is ill-equipped and neglected. It lacks modern law enforcement technology. "We have cars and guns only," he said. Razzak added that the ISF was further hampered because it was no longer allowed to use physical force on suspects. "Now we interview, not interrogate." The ISF drug enforcement department must rely on investigative techniques, but lacks the modern equipment to do so. For example, he must use the DNA lab at the American University of Beirut for DNA matching. Germany donated a DNA lab to the ISF, but the ISF has been unable to hire DNA specialists, according to Razzak.

¶6. (C) In addition, the ISF tends to rotate out Razzak's position every year. This frequent turnover has been disruptive to drug enforcement, he said. Because of a lack of resources, Razzak's unit focuses on two roads in the Biqa Valley that are most used for drug transport. Razzak added that the ISF was more aggressive on drug enforcement when Ilias Murr was Minister of Interior.

¶7. (C) The Palestinian refugee camps present another obstacle, according to Razzak. Drug addicts and drug traffickers are increasing in number in the Palestinian camps. Razzak said his unit has good information that drug offenders are hiding in the camps. However, the GOL does not allow the ISF to move into the camps to make arrests because of concerns over the safety of ISF personnel. Razzak said that he has tried to negotiate with the leaders of the Palestinian camps to hand over the suspects, but he gets the runaround. Palestinian camp officials ask him for more evidence and suggest the ISF is mistaken. When asked if Hizballah, the major power in the Biqa Valley, is involved in the drug trade, Razzak replied that Hizballah is not involved in the drug trade and does not interfere with drug enforcement.

¶8. (C) Though Lebanon is still mostly a transit country, internal demand is on the rise, according to Razzak. He estimated that since the Hariri assassination in February 2005, the rate of drug use in Lebanon has doubled. Razzak explained that in Lebanon, drug use is a major crime.

Persons convicted of drug use face up to three years in prison, though this is usually spent at a drug rehabilitation center.

¶ 9. (C) In closing, Razzak requested more aid from the Mini-Dublin countries, adding that, with the exception of Germany, assistance to date has been disappointing. Razzak asked for equipment donations. He mentioned that his unit could use tazers because suspects often resist arrest.

DRUG ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

¶ 10. (C) Razzak provided a hand-out with drug enforcement statistics from 2004 and 2005. In 2004, there were 1,707 total arrests for drug-related offenses. Arrests are further broken down as follows: 1,189 addicts, 257 dealers, 24 smugglers, seven farmers, eight carriers, 178 brokers, and 44 "others." In 2005, there were 2,053 total arrests for drug-related offenses. Broken down, the arrests included 1,507 addicts, 164 dealers, 41 smugglers, 25 farmers, seven carriers, 277 brokers, and 32 "others."

¶ 11. (C) Drug seizures for 2004 included 905 kg of hashish, 79 grams of opium, 2.3 kg of heroin, 11.8 kg of cocaine, 2.3 kg of marijuana, and 37,073 "piles." In addition, the ISF in 2004 seized 98 kg of hashish seeds, 9.2 kg of opium seeds, five liters of hydrochloric acid, and 98.2 kg of white materials to mix drugs. The seizure statistics for 2005 were 5,944 kg of hashish, 17 grams of opium, 928 grams of heroin, 24 kg of cocaine, 622 grams of marijuana, and 2,603 "piles." In 2005, the ISF seized 430 kg of hashish seeds, 2.1 kg of opium seeds, 1,130 kg of hashish plants, and 150 grams of white materials to mix drugs.

COMMENT

BEIRUT 00002175 003 OF 003

¶ 12. (C) A diplomat sitting next to econoff commented that he has visited the ISF drug enforcement offices and found them lacking for even the most basic of equipment. The computers were old, there was no photocopier until two months ago, and the offices were grubby and shabby. Most of the unit's cars are 1980s vintage. End comment.

FELTMAN